



Senator Feinstein Joins Senator McConnell To Urge Renewal of  
Sanctions against Burma  
April 30, 2004

*Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) are urging Congress to renew economic sanctions against Burma, which were first imposed by legislation they cosponsored last year, the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.*

*Cosponsors of the resolution, introduced Thursday, are: Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Sam Brownback (R-KS), Tom Daschle (D-SD), Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Conrad Burns (R-MT), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), George Allen (R-VA), John Edwards (D-NC), Don Nickles (R-OK), Jon Corzine (D-NJ), Joseph Biden (D-DE), Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Rick Santorum (R-PA). Following is the text of Senator Feinstein's floor statement on Thursday:*

"Mr. President, I rise today in support of a resolution introduced by myself and Senator McConnell to renew the sanctions imposed on Burma by the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.

Last year, in response to a brutal and vicious coordinated assault by pro-government paramilitary thugs on members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the arrest and detention the NLD's leader Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi in May, the U.S. Congress overwhelmingly passed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003 to impose a complete import ban on products from Burma.

Working together, Congress and the Administration demonstrated our determination to put pressure on the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to release Suu Kyi, respect the 1990 elections decisively won by the NLD and put Burma on an irreversible path of national reconciliation and democracy. One year later, it is clear that the SPDC has failed to make 'substantial and measurable progress' toward implementing a democratic government to have those sanctions lifted.

- Despite worldwide condemnation of her arrest and detention and calls for her immediate and unconditional release, Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. NLD Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo also remains in custody.
- Last August, the military junta proposed a seven-point 'road map' to democracy including a national convention to take place next month to draft a new constitution.

- Yet, there is no timetable for a restoration of democracy, no assurance that the SPDC will give up power, and no meaningful participation for Suu Kyi and the NLD.
- Numerous human rights abuses including torture, forced labor, rape, and sex trafficking continue unabated.
- The most recent State Department Human Rights report states: ‘The Government’s extremely poor human rights record worsened [in 2003] and it continued to commit numerous abuses.’
- Recently, the military junta sentenced three Burmese citizens to death for meeting with representatives of the International Labor Organization.
- 1,300 political prisoners are still in jail, many of them elected parliamentarians
- The government engages in the production and distribution of opium and methamphetamine.
- The Thai sponsored ‘Bangkok Process’ – designed to mediate a solution to the political situation in Burma – collapsed after one meeting with the SPDC’s refusal to attend further sessions with ‘like-minded’ countries. The regime said it was ‘too busy’ to attend this week’s session.

Over the past several months, the regime has gone to great lengths to rehabilitate its standing with its neighbors and the international community. Some hailed this as evidence that the SPDC was committed to national reconciliation, that engagement works, and that sanctions and other pressure on Rangoon should be eased to facilitate the implementation of the road map. I believe they are sadly mistaken.

Have we not learned anything about this regime’s intentions? What we need is substantive and meaningful action not more promises and empty statements. For over fifteen years, the SPDC has engaged in a systematic campaign to wipe out the democratic movement in Burma and the NLD’s 1990 election victory. For over fifteen years we have listened to assurances that the SPDC was committed to national reconciliation and a dialogue with all parties on restoring democracy and still nothing has changed.

I was cautiously optimistic when Suu Kyi was first released from house arrest two years ago. Yet, sure enough, one year later she was back in custody. The regime showed its true colors in orchestrating and carrying out the brutal attack on Suu Kyi.

Whatever the regime might say about ‘road maps’ and ‘national conventions,’ their actions have clearly demonstrated that they are uninterested in restoring democracy to the Burmese people and will take any steps necessary to hold on to power. Even if, as we all hope, Suu Kyi is released and is invited to take part in the National Convention, we must maintain pressure on the SPDC and keep the sanctions in place.

Earlier this week, the SPDC allowed members of the NLD to meet with Suu Kyi to discuss their participation at the Convention. This is hardly progress.

‘Substantial and measurable’ progress is just that and we should not settle for lofty pronouncements or actions that should have taken place long ago.

To ease the pressure would only encourage Rangoon to continue to play its games and keep Suu Ky and the NLD at bay.

I am pleased that Secretary of State Colin Powell has testified that the Administration supports reauthorizing the sanctions.

He recently stated, 'I have seen no improvement in the situation. Aung San Suu Kyi remains unable to participate in public political life in Burma, and we will not ignore that. We will not shrink from the strong position we have taken.'

Now is not the time to let up in our quest for a democratic and free Burma. While I understand that some may be concerned about the impact of sanctions on ordinary Burmese citizens, our actions enjoy the support of democratic movement in Burma.

Daw San, an elected member of Burma's parliament, testified before the House International Relations Committee in support of renewing the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act.

Daw San said the Act is 'critical to supporting the democracy movement inside the country while cutting off the junta's ability to fund their instrument of oppression – their intelligence service, their military, their informants and thugs.'

Those who are fighting for democracy, freedom, and human rights in Burma are looking to use for support. We must not let them down. I urge my colleagues to support the resolution."

###